On Developing a Virtual Museum of Greek Immigration and Language in Canada[.]

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we present a digital museum that is being developed in the context of the project 'Immigration and Language in Canada: Greeks and Greek-Canadians', sponsored by the Niarchos Foundation. The project involves research teams from four universities, one Greek, University of Patras, and three Canadian, McGill (Montreal), York University (Toronto) and Simon Fraser University (Vancouver). It concerns the first-generation immigrants, mainly of the period 1945-1975, which has seen the bulk of Greek immigration in Canada. The museum will present various aspects of the immigrants' experiences, laying emphasis on information linked to the reasons for immigrating, the points of departure and arrival, the process of integration in the Canadian environment, the way their mother tongue has been affected, the organization of Greek communities across Canada, labour and working places, their religious life, school education, and lastly the participation in various public events. For the development of the museum, state-of-the art technologies (HTML5, JavaScript, CSS3, jQuery, AJAX) and a JavaScript 3D-engine on the basis of babylon.js are being used in order to create a virtual environment within the client's browser, thus providing the user with a friendly experience so as to gain access to exhibits via virtual navigation. The material presented is chosen from a platform for the backend database and a repository, which were previously constructed as a prerequisite. It consists of oral data collected from available written sources and via interviews conducted in Canadian provinces which have massively accepted Greek immigrants. Having been constructed with Drupal CMS (v.7), an open source content management system (CMS) that is actively supported by thousands of programmers, the database consists of the following ontologies: *sources*, *field researches*, *linguistic varieties*, *places*, *informants* that all connect to the main ontology of *media files*.

KEYWORDS

DEVELOPING A VIRTUAL MUSEUM FOR GREEK IMMIGRATION

The project "Immigration and Language in Canada: Greeks and Greek-Canadians" is the first attempt ever made to create a virtual museum about Greek expatriates, contributing to the general study of Greek transatlantic immigration and the understanding of ethnic diversity in the Canadian society. Research groups from four Universities, one Greek, University of Patras, and three Canadian, McGill (Montreal), York University (Toronto) and Simon Fraser University (Vancouver), collaborate in this newly-undertaken research program (January 2017-December 2018), which has been funded by the Niarchos Foundation and aims at exploring the social history and language of first-generation Greek immigrants in Canada, between the years 1945 and 1975 which have seen the bulk of Greek immigration, for various reasons, political, economic, personal, etc.

The project attempts to move a step beyond the standard practice in linguistic and historical research by producing ground-breaking deliverables in connection with the development of digital humanities that will ensure the sustainability of the results. In this vein, oral (recordings of narratives) and written material are collected in several Canadian provinces, where there are big Greek communities. So far, there are about 210 hours of recordings of narratives, the collection of which has been made by the three Canadian universities, following ethnographic methods [6]. The oral material is complemented by photographs of private and public immigrant life, and written data drawn from the available sources, such as documents (e.g. passports), dissertations (among others, [1], [3], [5]), books describing community life (among others, [1], [2], [4]) and extracts of

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newspapers. The collected material has been stored in an electronic depository and new technologies are being used for its processing in order to make the data easily accessible to anyone interested in exploring the different historical, social and linguistic aspects of Greek-Canadian communities. The deliverables of the project aspire to raise public interest in Greek-Canadian history and language contact between Greek and English, provide a long-lasting point of reference for educational and social purposes, and shed light on the connection of Greek immigrants to the social and cultural history of the host country, that is, Canada.

The main deliverable of the project is a Virtual Museum, which is being designed by the research group of the *Laboratory of Modern Greek Dialects* (LMGD) of the University of Patras (www.lmgd.philology.upatras.gr). It consists of an online portal encompassing the Canadian-Greek immigrant experience from Greece to Canada, the content of which is based on interdisciplinarity among historical, sociological and linguistic research conducted by the four universities. For this purpose, as a prerequisite, a repository and a platform for the backend database were previously constructed by LMGD, which help the researchers of the four collaborating universities to introduce manually the material under investigation and classify a list of their properties concerning data and metadata. Drupal CMS was used, version 7, an open source Content Management System employed by thousands of programmers. The database was developed on the basis of the following ontologies: *sources*, *field researches*, *linguistic varieties*, *places*, *informants* that all connect to the main ontology of *media files*. In particular, the collected material is categorized as follows:

(a)   old photos and pictures (jpg/pdf);
(b)   raw narratives/interviews (wav/flac);
(c)   fully transcribed interviews in Praat and LaTeX[1]/pdf;
(d)   translated narratives in English (LaTeX/pdf);
(e)   videos (wav);
(f)   digitized newspapers and/or magazines of the decades under examination (jpg/pdf).

For the construction of the Virtual Museum on Greek Immigration in Canada, thirty-five virtual museums from all over the World have been studied, among which the following have been considered as the most appropriate ones for serving as models to the museum under development:

The *British Migration Museum* (http://migrationmuseum.org), the *Australian Immigration Museum* (https://museumvictoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum/), the *Virtual Museum of Canada* (http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/home/) and the *Virtual Museum of Italian immigration in the Illawarra* (Australia). (http://vmiii.com.au/).

In its present version, the Virtual Museum on Greek Immigration in Canada, consists of: (a) an athrium containing a short documentary and two maps, one of Greece and one of Canada with (blinking) towns and villages which represent the points of departure and arrival, respectively; (b) 10 rooms corresponding to 10 major themes that are determined by the interviews and generally the collected material. They comprise: 1) A brief overview of Greece and Canada in the '40s and '50s; 2) Reasons for immigrating - The trip; 3) Arrival and settlement; 4) Labour - Working places; 5) Family life; 6) Community life; 7) Schooling - education; 8) Church - religious life; 9) Language; 10) Leisure - Events.
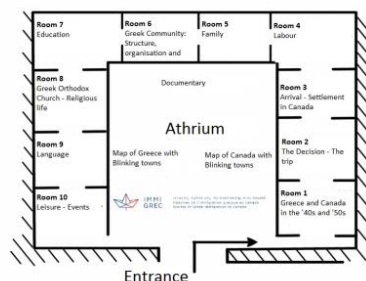

Figure 1: A top view of the virtual museum on Greek immigration in Canada

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[1] For easiness and saving time, LaTex, a familiar tool to the researchers of all teams was used for the transcription of the interviews, although it is not easily amenable to modification by the user. If necessary, LaTex will be converted to the Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML), specifically to the SGML tag set created by the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI), since the structural similarities of the TEI and LaTeX schemes allow for a relatively straightforward conversion.

For its development, state-of-the art technologies are being used (HTML5, JavaScript, CSS3, jQuery[2], AJAX) and a JavaScript 3D-engine is employed on the basis of babylon.js[3] in order to create a virtual environment within the client's browser, thus providing the user with a friendly experience so as to gain access to exhibits via virtual navigation.

The pioneering nature of the museum lies in the fact that it is an attempt to portray digitally, yet palpably, the degree of adaptation of Greek immigrants in their new country, the preservation and creative use or rejection of socio-cultural and linguistic identity traits, and how the Greek language and its dialectal variation have evolved in a language-contact situation, where English and/or French is the donor language and Greek the recipient. Interestingly, it constitutes the first attempt to conduct a thorough and systematic research on the history and language contact of Greek immigrants in Canada on the basis of data drawn from their life in an area geographically remote from Greece.

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[2] https://jquery.com/

[3] https://www.babylonjs.com/